

# Office of Human Resources

## Personnel Newsletter

March 2000

### **Misuse of Government Resources**

Recently, the Center issued official reprimands to employees who were found to have misused Government computing resources by forwarding e-mails that contained material that was not related to official business. The cases involved forwarding attachments that contained inappropriate and/or potentially offensive material. Because the material, some of which contained sexually suggestive images, was not unwelcome by the recipients, harsher disciplinary actions were not taken against the employees who were responsible for forwarding the documents to others.

In the past, civil service employees have been suspended for up to 35 days for introducing sexually explicit material into the workplace. In those instances, the material was introduced to others who found it offensive and unwelcome, included sexually explicit material, and/or occurred after lesser disciplinary actions were taken.

The Center has found that the introduction into the workplace of material that may be considered offensive, inappropriate and/or containing matter of a sexual nature is contrary to our model workplace goals. As a result, conduct that results in the introduction of such material into the workplace will not be tolerated. Misuse of Government resources has also been determined to be a serious issue. Allegations of such conduct are investigated and appropriate corrective action taken, if verified.

The Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch, 5 CFR Part 2635, provides information on the appropriate use of Government resources. The current policy regarding use of the Center's resources is outlined in

*(Continued on Page 2)*

### **THE SUGGESTION PROGRAM**

*If you keep doing what you've always done,  
you'll keep getting what you've always got.*

**SO..... SUGGEST**

The Suggestion Program is available online for those who would like to submit an eligible suggestion. The form is available on the Glenn Electronic Forms Page through Informed Filler at the following URL:

<http://itid.grc.nasa.gov/Eforms/InformedWebPages/home.htm>

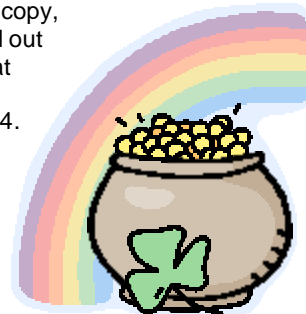
Just follow the prompts and instructions and submit.

For those submitting a hard copy, suggestions should be filled out on a NASA C-9034, Ideas at Work, form and sent to the Awards Office, M.S. 500-314.

Get \$5 for submitting an eligible suggestion and up to \$7,500 for those that are implemented.

If you have any questions or comments about the program, please contact Jennifer Cyrill at extension 3-2848, or you may visit the Web site at:

<http://www.grc.nasa.gov/WWW/OHR/Suggestion/>



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Personnel Policy Statement OHR-9. Unless and until this policy is superceded or canceled, the requirements contained in this policy statement remain in effect. The Center's policy on preventing and eliminating sexual harassment in the workplace as outlined in GLPD 3713.3, also provides guidance on this matter. If you have questions concerning the Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch please call the Ethics Program Manager at extension 3-2315. Questions concerning the Center's policy on the use of Center resources or disciplinary actions should be directed to the Employee Relations Officer in the Office of Human Resources at extension 3-2506. Questions concerning the Center's policy on preventing and eliminating sexual harassment should be directed to the Chief, Office of Equal Opportunity Programs at extension 3-2323.

Some things to consider:

1. Using e-mail to forward nonofficial information such as jokes is clearly inappropriate if the material contributes to a sexually hostile or otherwise discriminatory working environment (i.e., if it is of a sexual nature or expresses hatred on the basis of race, ethnicity, or religion). Using other Government resources to copy or transmit such information is also inappropriate.
2. Misuse of e-mail or other Government resources can also be a violation of the standards of conduct if it is for personal gain as in the case of chain letters, solicitations, or promotional activities.
3. If you receive any nonwork-related material, especially potentially inappropriate material, you are encouraged to notify the sender that you are not interested in receiving such material in the future. You may refer them to OHR-9, GLPD 3713.3 and/or this article.
4. If you should receive any material that is sexually explicit, obviously discriminatory, is otherwise potentially disruptive to the Center's mission, or violates the standards of conduct, notify one of the following:
  - a.) your supervisor,
  - b.) the sender's supervisor,
  - c.) supervisory/managerial official in their organizational chain of command,
  - d.) the Office of Equal Opportunity, or
  - e.) the Office of Human Resources.

Under no circumstances should you forward such material to others.

## **NEW WAYS TO CONTACT THE EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

Glenn employees and their family members are reminded that there are new and better ways to access the Employee Assistance Program.

A toll free hotline number is now available. It is (888) 438-3115. A licensed counselor is available during nonwork hours; i.e., after 5 p.m. During the business day, Glenn employees may continue to contact Dr. Joe Wasdovich, Employee Assistance Program Manager and Psychologist, at (216) 433-2989. He is located in Bldg. 15, Room 109.

Employees and their immediate family members are also entitled to three no-cost visits with any of the following providers. Just identify yourself as a Glenn employee or family member.

John Grimm, Ph.D.  
Psychologist  
Berea  
(440) 243-1606

Patricia Masterson, Ph.D.  
Psychologist  
Fairview Park and Beachwood  
(216) 292-7170

Kathleen Tolbert, LISW  
Clinical Social Worker  
Fairview Park and Solon  
(440) 542-9877

The Center for Families and Children  
EASE  
Various Northeast Ohio Locations  
(216) 241-3273

Community Health Partners  
CONCERN  
Lorain and Elyria  
(440) 233-1025

## **COLD WAR RECOGNITION CERTIFICATE**

The Secretary of Defense, in the 1998 National Defense Authorization Act, approved awarding the Cold War Recognition Certificate to all Federal Government civilian personnel who faithfully and honorably served the United States any time during the Cold War era, September 2, 1945, through December 26, 1991. To request a certificate, mail a letter with proof of eligibility (a copy of an SF-50 with your name, social security number, and date of service) to:

Cold War Recognition  
4035 Ridge Top Road  
Fairfax, VA 22030-7445

Further information and sample requests may be found at <http://147.103.18.232/>.

## ***OWCP Ruling Regarding Compensation Benefits for Telecommuter Employee***

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Federal employees who telecommute cannot receive workers compensation benefits for as wide a range of injuries as employees who work in agency offices, according to the Labor Department.

The rules for when a Telecommuter is eligible for workers' compensation benefits are set out in guidelines issued by the Labor Department's Office of Workers Compensation (OWCP), which administers the Federal Employees Compensation Act (FECA), and by a recent decision made by an appeals board that hears employees' complaints against OWCP.

"Employees who are directly engaged in performing the duties of their jobs are covered by FECA, regardless of whether the work is performed on the Agency's premises or at an alternative worksite," OWCP guidance says. "However, when an employee is on property under his/her own control, activities which are not immediately directed toward the actual performance or regular duties do not arise out of employment. An employee who works at a desk at home removes himself/herself from the performance of regular duties as soon as he/she walks away from that desk to use the bathroom, get a cup of coffee, or seek fresh air."

The same rules do not apply for employees working at an agency office. In the official workplace, a legal concept called the "personal comfort doctrine" holds employers responsible for injuries employees sustain while, for example, changing the temperature or going to the restroom.

Federal managers' interest in the rules governing telecommuting safety were sparked earlier this month when the Occupational Safety and Health Administration released, and then rescinded, an advisory letter on how private companies should deal with telecommuting safety. The OSHA letter did not affect rules governing Federal agencies.

In a recent case before the Employees' Compensation Appeals Board, Internal Revenue Service employee Julietta M. Reynolds sought workers compensation benefits after she injured herself while working from home.

Reynolds, then a 54-year-old revenue officer, was working at home on January 12, 1996, when she started to get a cold. The thermostat wasn't working, so Reynolds went down to the basement to restart the furnace. On her way back upstairs, she fell on the stairway and hurt her right leg and left toes. After getting a doctor's note, Reynolds filed for workers' compensation benefits.

In a letter to OWCP, the IRS said the employee was not directed to repair her furnace and that furnace repairs did not pertain to her official duties. Reynolds countered that if she had been working in her office at the time of the accident, there would be no question that she was covered.

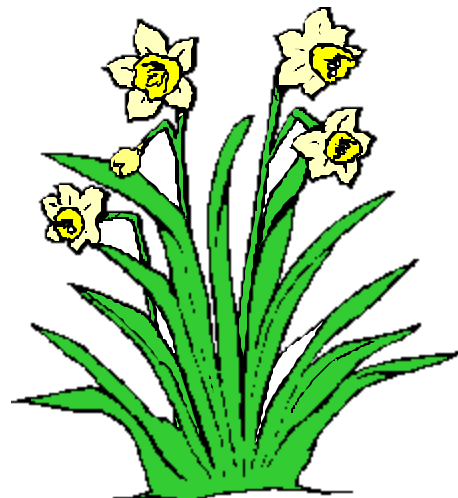
The OWCP initially denied her claim, but in July 1996, an OWCP hearing representative reversed the denial. Then in October 1996, the office reopened the case and ruled that the personal comfort doctrine does not apply to employees who work at home. Finally, in August 1999, the appeals board upheld the OWCP's ruling that Reynolds should not receive any benefits.

"While at home, the employee is responsible for maintaining his/her home in a safe manner, over which the employer has no control of hazards," the board said in its decision. "For this reason, the [OWCP] determined that only those injuries which occur while an employee is 'actually performing his/her work at home' are considered to arise in the course of employment."

The OWCP does not keep statistics on how many at-home workers file for workers compensation benefits, spokeswoman Sue Blumenthal said.

Wendell Joice, a telecommuting expert at the General Services Administration, said an employee's ability to control the environment of a home office is a major reason why people like to work from home.

"The fact that you can make your office the way you want it has a fair impact on your productivity," Joice said. "You can have the lighting, the temperature, the air flow, the way you want it."



## **"HR Forum" Videotapes Available In The Learning Center**

For the past year, the Office of Human Resources has been presenting a series of informative "HR Forums" for the benefit of GRC managers, supervisors, and employees. The purpose of these forums is to present important information regarding human resources issues. The following presentations were videotaped and are now available in the Learning Center:

- HR Forum #1: Federal Leave Programs
- HR Forum #2: Dual Career Ladder Concept
- HR Forum #3: Employee Relations and Employee Assistance Program
- HR Forum #4: Work-Related Illness and Injury
- HR Forum #5: Competitive Placement Process for Supervisors and Non-Supervisors
- HR Forum #6: Merit System Principles and Prohibited Personnel Practices
- HR Forum #7: Compensation, Pay, Recognition and Awards
- HR Forum #8: Identifying and Addressing Performance Problems

The presentations run from 45 to 90 minutes in length and may be viewed in the Learning Center or borrowed for use at home or in your office.

For more information on these or other Learning Center programs, give us a call or visit our web site at <http://www.grc.nasa.gov/WWW/LC>

**The Learning Center is located in Building 21, Room 3**  
**Hours: 7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday**  
**433-2996 or 433-2997**

### **NASA EXTERNAL AWARDS**

Every quarter, the Center receives requests for nominations for a wide variety of non-NASA awards. A call letter with nomination criteria summaries is sent to the directorate/staff offices for distribution. Please call the Awards Office at 3-2848, for specific information.

The following is a list of non-NASA External Awards solicitation due this quarter, April to June 2000:

*Admiral Luis De Florez Flight Safety Award*  
*AIAA Fellow, Associate Fellow, and Honorary Fellow*  
*Aviation Week and Space Technology*  
*Distinguished Service Award*  
*Dr. Nathan Davis Awards*  
*Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC)*  
*Outstanding Achievement Award*  
*Federal Environmental Engineer of the Year Award*  
*Federal Property Manager of the Year*  
*Government Technology Leadership Awards*  
*GSA Achievement Award for Real Property Innovation*  
*Hispanic Engineer National Achievement Award*  
*John N. Sturdivant National Partnership Award*  
*Katharine Wright Memorial Award*  
*Laura Taber Barbour Air Safety Award*  
*National Air and Space Museum Trophy*  
*National Medal of Science*  
*Nevada Medal*  
*William A. Jump Memorial Award*



## **TAKE ANOTHER GLANCE OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES WEB SITE**

### **Adobe Acrobat**

OHR is beginning to store our documents and newsletters in .PDF format. This will allow you to view formatted documents and have greater control over printing.

### **What's New**

A What's New list is a list of the most recently changed pages in a site. It allows OHR repeat visitors to see, at a glance, how our site has changed since they were last there. We want to keep our repeat visitors happy!

### **Site Map**

The Site Map is a concise outline of the top-level structure of a site. It allows OHR visitors to see quickly what the main sections of our site are and then jump to the desired section.

### **Search the OHR Web Site**

Looking for something in particular? You cannot find it. Searches are an important part of Internet on-line activities. They are designed to help you easily find and get to the Web page(s) you're looking for.

Now the Office of Human Resources has the ability to do just that!

Visitors will see results for the OHR site only, not the entire web! This is great for our visitors who know what they need and want to find it fast.

### **What's Available**

The following areas are available on the OHR Web Page: Employment, Benefits, Resources, and Training, important announcements, upcoming events and more.

### **Take Another Glance at the OHR Web Site**

<http://www.grc.nasa.gov/WWW/OHR/>

## **DEB Parking**

*As you may be aware, residents of and visitors to the Development Engineering Building (DEB) may use the parking area behind the DEB, on a space available basis. Employees may gain access to the parking area behind the building by using the keypad, which has been installed on the eastside of the building by the lift gate. When a correct PIN (Personal Identification Number) is entered on the keypad, the lift gate will rise and allow entry. Any employee interested in obtaining a PIN should contact Tony Phillips at 3-2154. There are a limited number of PIN's available. They are assigned on a first come first serve basis, however, an individual with a disability will be given preference.*

## ***Information Regarding Thrift Savings Plan Changes***

The Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) has been developing a new record keeping system to accommodate the addition of a number of new features, including two new investment funds, daily valuation of accounts, and enhanced withdrawal benefits. Information about the new system has been provided in the *Highlights* that accompany the semiannual TSP participant statements. The leaflet *How the TSP is Changing*, which accompanied the November *Highlights*, explained these enhancements and the changes to the TSP that will occur when the new record keeping system is implemented. The leaflet is available from the TSP Web site, [www.tsp.gov](http://www.tsp.gov), in Current Information, Forms, and Publications. Please note that the dates in that leaflet will be updated shortly to reflect the new schedule.

When it was awarded in May 1997, the contract anticipated a 3-year project schedule for design, development, testing, and implementation of the new system; this would have resulted in a May 2000 project completion date. At a meeting in early January with senior officials of the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board, the contractor, American Management Systems, Inc., recommended an implementation deferral to accommodate the extensive system-testing program, which has experienced recent delays. After evaluating the AMS recommendation, the Board concurred that a deferral was necessary and established the October 2000 implementation date.

In January, all TSP participants will be sent a letter advising them of the new implementation date. After that, the next mailing to all participants will be the May 2000 participant statements. The TSP will provide an update on the record keeping system in the *Highlights* that accompany the statements. The TSP will also send participants a mailing in August regarding the transition to the new system. In the meantime, information about the new system is available on the TSP Web site.

Because the two new funds (Small Capitalization Stock Index Investment (S) Fund and International Stock Index Investment (I) Fund) are features of the new record keeping system, they will not be available until October 2000.

Daily processing of interfund transfer requests is dependent upon the new record keeping system. Therefore, this feature will also be available in October.

Daily valuation means that at the close of each business day TSP accounts will be valued based on the share prices of the funds in which the participant has invested. Currently, TSP accounts are valued once a month, at the end of the month. Daily valuation will permit the TSP to process transactions daily, including interfund transfers and the disbursement of loans and withdrawals, effective October 2000.

The new withdrawal options and the other changes to the TSP withdrawal program, which were described in the leaflet *How the TSP is Changing* (that accompanied the November 1999, participant statements), cannot be implemented until the new record keeping system is implemented. Consequently, the opportunity to make a partial or mixed withdrawal will not be available until October 2000.

The next participant statement mailing will be in May 2000, as usual. The transition statement will be sent to you in September and will cover the months of May through August. More information about the transition will be provided in the May *Highlights* and a special August mailing to all participants.

Loan and withdrawal requests received after March 15 will be processed under our current rules. The new transition month will be September. More information about the transition will be provided in the May *Highlights* and a special August mailing to all participants.

The next open season will be held from May 15 through July 31, 2000. Until the new system is implemented, you will continue to allocate your contributions among the three investment funds through a Form TSP-1 submitted to your agency during the May 15 through July 13, 2000, open season. Once the new system is operational, you will make these contribution allocation elections directly with the TSP.

